

Travel Montana

Usability Study Final Research Report

Presented by:
OnTarget Consulting & Research
May 21, 2008



REPORT OVERVIEW

This report summarizes the results and presents key findings from a two-step research effort designed to help Travel Montana increase the usability and value of Travel Montana's Vacation Planner, Winter Guide and Calendar of Events with consumers considering travel to Montana.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held in Seattle, Washington. Group participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- Had taken a minimum of four vacations of at least three nights in the past two years
- Were the primary vacation planners for their families
- Had used printed and/or web-based vacation guides/planners to help plan past vacations
- Were between the ages of 35 – 65, with at least 50% being between the ages of 45 and 65
- Had a household income of at least \$75,000
- Had traveled to Montana for a vacation or were considering traveling to Montana for a vacation in the future.

The majority of discussion during the focus groups was based on the results of participants actually using the state's three publications to help plan a desired vacation to Montana.

Web Research

Consumers who were a part of Travel Montana's email database were invited to participate in a 5 – 7 minute web survey. Findings from the focus groups were used to help design the web survey questions. Over 3,700 consumers participated in the survey with over 60% of respondents reporting being between the ages of 45 – 65.

KEY FINDINGS AND INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Findings and Recommendations

- Consumers who have or are interested in traveling to Montana want to understand what makes the state interesting and special, including being shown the depth of its beauty and the range of things to see and do while there. All travel tools must effectively respond to this need.
- The Vacation Planner is seen as the most effective tool that Travel Montana provides to the public. Research participants believe that the Planner can do a better job of telling people what makes Montana unique. Specific suggestions include using more and bigger pictures, presenting the story of what is special about Montana in the front of the Planner and not cluttering the telling of this story with any advertising.
- Consumers like the regional presentation of travel information that the state is currently utilizing. They would like Travel Montana to do a better job pointing out the unique features of each region.
- Consumers are also very interested in understanding what lodging options are available to them and the cost of those lodging options. Both focus group and web survey results indicate the importance of providing this information. It appears to be an essential part of the decision-making process and must be presented in a clear and logical way. Based on research results, it is recommended that lodging options be presented by region and by price (instead of alphabetically).
- Nearly 3 out of 4 research respondents who fall within Travel Montana's primary age demographic of 45 – 65 report using the internet as their primary tool to plan vacations. Given this fact, it is essential that the design and navigation of the Travel Planner be structured to be as close to the design and navigation that consumers would expect to see if they were viewing the Planner on a fully-functional website. Additionally, it is recommended that Travel Montana consider taking steps to develop a fully-functional website as part of its promotional efforts to effectively compete with other established travel websites.
- Nearly 60% of respondents report liking to look at vacation information that covers all seasons of the year at one time. Over 35% indicate a preference to see information for specific seasons. If Travel

Montana decides to eliminate its Winter Guide, it is recommended that it consider highlighting some season-specific information in the Vacation Planner.

Detailed Findings and Recommendations from Focus Groups

- The majority of focus group participants used the Vacation Planner to help plan their vacation. They saw it as having the most information of any of the three publications they were given to plan their vacation.
- Participants believed that the majority of the type of information that they would need to plan a vacation was in the Planner vs. the Guide and Calendar of Events.
- Participants liked the regional presentation format of the Planner.
- Although they used the Planner to plan their vacation, the majority of participants reported that they didn't like many parts of the design, flow and functionality of the Planner. Specific concerns included:
 - They didn't see the guide as presenting a compelling story about what makes Montana special. They believed doing so was important, especially for someone who was not familiar with the unique characteristics of the state.
 - They wanted the ability to get to the information they were interested in as quickly as possible and did not find that possible with the existing Planner design.
 - The flow of information was confusing and hard to follow (it was hard to navigate through). Participants reported not seeing a logical flow to the information that was presented to them.
 - The state map and table of contents were hard to find and not placed in the very front of the Planner (where people expected to find them).
 - Participants believed the regional presentation of information could have been more impactful and compelling. They wanted to quickly understand what made each region unique and didn't think that the current Planner design accomplished that.
 - Participants wanted all information concerning a specific region to be included as part of the regional section.
 - Participants wanted to navigate the lodging information more easily to better help them decide what lodging choice to select.
 - Participants didn't like where the advertising was placed in the Planner, especially in the very front of it.
- Specific recommendations suggested by participants to improve the planner included:
 - Do a better job of telling readers what makes Montana special and why they should vacation there. Romance them. Present this information in the front of the planner and in each regional section
 - Use more/bigger pictures in the Planner to help sell Montana.
 - Make it easier for people to find the information they are looking for. Continue using the current regional structure but include all region-specific information within each regional section.
 - Lodging information is important. Make it easier for people to find the type of lodging they are looking for. Presenting lodging options by type of lodging is effective. Consider listing lodging options by price within each type of lodging section.

- Consider modifying where advertising is placed in the guide. Don't place it in the front of the Planner and work to not have it detract from the communication goals of the regional sections of the Planner.
- Things most liked about the planner included:
 - The regional presentation of information
 - The depth of lodging information
- Participants liked the design of the Winter Guide. They wished that the Planner's design format was much closer to that of the Guide because it did a better job of presenting information in a way that was easier for them to follow and understand.
- Participants did not see much value in the Calendar of Events, primarily because it didn't cover a 12-month period. They suggested placing more events in the Planner and Guide and eliminating the calendar.
- The majority of participants reported that they would be very interested in using a web-based version of the Planner in conjunction with the printed version. Additionally, they wanted the design and navigation of both to be very similar.

DETAILED FINDINGS – FOCUS GROUPS

Publication Ratings (based on a 1 - 10 scale, with 10 being the highest score possible)

Nine participants gave a rating of five (5) or less. Main reasons given for their scores included:

- The map showing the state and table of contents were buried. Too much information with no easy way to sort through it
- Very hard to find information. Confusing to navigate through
- I can't interact with it
- Limited information available
- Very hard to compare different places to consider visiting
- Information was well grouped
- It was hard to find the information that I wanted to find to decide where to go
- Hard to navigate compared to the internet
- Information was all over the place and hard to find
- Too much advertising. Not enough narrative
- It helped me decide where to go but it was confusing

Nine participants gave a rating of six (6) or greater. Main reasons given for their scores included:

- The information was segmented well but it didn't tell me what made the state so special
- Information not easy to access
- It was confusing to find what I was looking for
- There was too much information and things were too hard to find
- I liked the fact that the regions were well mapped out
- The table of contents was easy to follow
- The table of contents was good
- The planner was well organized and split the state into manageable regions
- Good pictures
- Like the fact that the information was presented by regions

Things liked best or found most useful about the guides

- I liked the detailed information on lodging

- There were lots of accommodation options
- I liked the ads with pictures. They helped see what I could do in Montana
- The pictures were effective in helping me to see and decide where to go
- Everything I needed to plan my vacation was there
- I liked the index and regional breakout of information
- I liked the hotel section. It had everything I needed to decide what type of lodging to select
- Regional presentation of information was very helpful
- I liked the maps and city information
- The pictures were great
- Regional information was presented in a consistent way
- Lots of information to help me plan my trip

Things identified as confusing or not liked by tools

- It was very hard find the information I was looking for. Things are all over the place
- There was too much information and it was hard for me to streamline my search of information to get the information I wanted
- The information was hard to read. Font size needed to be bigger on the detailed information pages
- I didn't like having the services located in the back of the Vacation Planner
- There were too many ads. They made it hard for me to find the information I wanted to find
- The guide was very confusing if you didn't know much about Montana
- Too many ads with no real logic about how they were placed in the book
- Not enough pictures to show me what Montana is like and the pictures that were there were too small
- Event information was hard to find
- No understanding of distance between locations
- Too many ads
- There was a lack of bold titles to direct me through the guides

DETAILED FINDINGS – WEB SURVEY

When considering a vacation to a specific destination, how important are each of the following in helping you decide if you will visit that destination?

	<u>Extremely important</u>	<u>Somewhat important</u>	<u>Not very important</u>	<u>Not important at all</u>
Natural beauty	78.1%	20.8%	.9%	.2%
Wide range of lodging options	69.1	25.6	4.5	.8
Wide range of places to visit	57.2	38.6	4.0	.2
Wide range of recreational options	30.9	50.9	16.7	1.5
Wide range of activities	25.7	49.4	22.6	2.4

If you were considering visiting a specific state that you had never visited before, how important would each of the following be in helping you decide if you would visit that state?

	<u>Extremely important</u>	<u>Somewhat important</u>	<u>Not very important</u>	<u>Not important at all</u>
Understanding cost of lodging options	65.1%	29.0%	5.2%	.7%
Knowing the type of lodging options available	59.5	33.8	6.0	.7
Detailed information about different regions of the state	58.7	35.8	5.2	.2
Recommendations on what to do	53.8	40.4	5.3	.4
Knowing distance between regions and cities	52.4	37.6	9.2	.8
Knowing what made the state special	52.2	42.1	5.4	.4
Knowing about activities and	43.2	43.2	12.3	1.3

events to participate in

If you were considering visiting a specific city in the state you were interested in traveling to, how important would each of the following be in helping you decide if you would visit that city?

	<u>Extremely Important</u>	<u>Somewhat Important</u>	<u>Not very important</u>	<u>Not important at all</u>
Knowing the natural attractions near the city	78.1%	20.4%	1.2%	.2%
Knowing what lodging options were available	67.1	27.3	4.5	1.1
Knowing the cost of lodging options	65.8	28.3	4.8	1.2
Understanding the characteristic and personality of the city	43.9	46.6	8.8	.8
Knowing what activities are available to participate in	43.7	42.7	11.7	1.9

Generally speaking, what time of year do you most often travel on vacations?

Spring	11.2%
Summer	53.7
Fall	27.2
Winter	2.9

Where is the first place you would look to find information about a state you were considering traveling to?

	<u>Total</u>	<u>18 – 25</u>	<u>26 – 35</u>	<u>36 - 45</u>	<u>46 – 55</u>	<u>56 – 65</u>	<u>≥ 65</u>
Internet	74.8%	77.4%	80.8%	83.1%	78.5%	70.9%	57.7%

Where is the second place you would look to find information about a state you were considering traveling to?

	<u>Total</u>	<u>18 – 25</u>	<u>26 – 35</u>	<u>36 - 45</u>	<u>46 – 55</u>	<u>56 – 65</u>	<u>> 65</u>
Travel brochures from state	59.4%	52.8%	59.4%	63.9%	59.5%	59.0%	53.7%

What is the first/second question that you would want answered to help you determine if you would actually visit the state you were considering visiting?

Sample of Most Often Mentioned Questions

1. Things to see and do
2. Lodging options and price of lodging
3. What attractions are available/price
4. Best way to get there/airline details
5. What does natural beauty look like
6. Info on national/state parks
7. How expensive
8. Temperature/climate
9. Type of wildlife
10. Things for families to do

Do you like to look at vacation information for a particular state or region that covers information for all seasons of the year or one that covers specific seasons of the year?

All seasons	59.9%
Specific seasons	35.8%

Which of the following is most important to you when selecting a place to stay while on a vacation?

Quality	38.0%
Price	37.8%
Uniqueness	19.0%

Generally speaking, which type of vacation traveler description best fits your personality?

- a. Active – I like to do a lot of things and go a lot of places while on vacation
- b. Relaxed – I like to go to a location and just relax

c. Mixed – I like a combination of activities and relaxation while on my vacation

	<u>Total</u>	<u>18 – 25</u>	<u>26 – 35</u>	<u>36 - 45</u>	<u>46 – 55</u>	<u>56 – 65</u>	<u>> 65</u>
Mixed	68.0%	64.2%	70.7%	72.2%	67.5%	65.5%	67.8%
Active	26.5%	26.4%	23.8%	24.8%	27.6%	28.0%	24.4%
Relaxed	5.4%	9.4%	5.4%	3.0%	4.8%	6.6%	7.7%

Which age range do you fit into?

	<u>18 – 25</u>	<u>26 – 35</u>	<u>36 - 45</u>	<u>46 – 55</u>	<u>56 – 65</u>	<u>> 65</u>
Percentage of sample	1.4%	6.4%	19.5%	31.3%	29.2%	12.2%